

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF GEORGIA  
GAINESVILLE DIVISION**

Tristian Dunnell,

Plaintiff,

v.

Southwest Credit Systems, L.P.,

Defendant.

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Civil Action File No.:

**COMPLAINT WITH  
JURY TRIAL DEMAND**

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**PRELIMINARY STATEMENT**

This action for damages is based upon the Defendant's overt and intentional, unlawful conduct in the furtherance of its efforts to collect a consumer debt. The Defendant's conduct is in violation of the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act (FDCPA), 15 U.S.C. 1692 *et seq.* and for violations of the Georgia Fair Business Practices Act (GFBPA), O.C.G.A. 10-1-390 *et seq.*

**PARTIES**

1. Plaintiff, Tristian Dunnell, is a natural person who resides in Hall County, Georgia.

2. Defendant, Southwest Credit Systems, LP, is a limited partnership formed under the laws of the State of Texas and not registered to do business in

Georgia. Defendant Southwest may be served with process via its registered agent, Jeff A. Hurt, at 4120 International Parkway, Suite 1100, Carrollton, Texas 75007-1958.

### **JURISDICTION AND VENUE**

3. This Court has federal question jurisdiction over Plaintiff's Fair Debt Collection Practices Act ("FDCPA"), 15 U.S.C. § 1692 *et seq.*, claims pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1331 and 15 U.S.C. § 1692k(d). This Court has supplemental jurisdiction over Plaintiff's state law claims pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1367.

4. This Court has personal jurisdiction over Defendant because, *inter alia*, Defendants frequently and routinely conducts business in the State of Georgia, including the conduct complained of herein.

5. Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1391, venue is proper in the Northern District of Georgia because a substantial part of the events or omissions giving rise to the claims occurred in this district.

6. Pursuant to LR 3.1B(3), venue is proper in the Gainesville Division because the events described herein occurred in Hall County which is in the Atlanta Division.

### **FACTUAL ALLEGATIONS**

7. Plaintiff is allegedly obligated to pay a consumer debt arising out of a cable bill and is therefore, a “consumer”, as that term is defined by 15 U.S.C. § 1692a(3).

8. Defendant’s principal business is the collection of consumer debt and the collection of those accounts for its commercial benefit. Defendant regularly collects, or attempts to collect, directly or indirectly, debts owed or due, or asserted to be owed or due, to a third party.

9. Defendant uses interstate commerce and/or mail in its business in the collection of consumer debts.

10. Defendant manages, and collects upon, thousands of consumer debt accounts annually.

11. Defendant is, therefore, a “debt collector” as that term is defined by 15 U.S.C. § 1692a(6).

12. Defendant had placed negative account information on Plaintiff’s credit report.

13. In June of 2020, Plaintiff called Defendant in response to the credit reporting information.

14. When Plaintiff identified himself on the phone call, the Defendant’s representative told Plaintiff the account was for an unpaid cable bill.

15. During the course of the call with Defendant's agents, Plaintiff advised Defendant that he could not receive phone calls between 8:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. because he was at work during these hours and could lose his job if he received phone calls.

16. Plaintiff did seek to bar the Defendant from calling him at any hour otherwise permitted by law; for example, between 5:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m.

17. Defendant's representative received his request and told Plaintiff that she can't control the phone calls and told Plaintiff, "just don't answer it."

18. Defendant's statement implied that Defendant was going to continue phone calls to Plaintiff which Defendant did not have the legal right to make.

19. Defendant's statements were false, deceptive, and misleading communications in connection with the collection of a debt.

20. Defendant's statements were intended to coerce Plaintiff into making payments via threats to harass him with calls during his work hours.

### **INJURIES-IN-FACT**

21. The FDCPA provides consumers with "statutorily-created rights to be free from 'being subjected to false, deceptive, unfair, or unconscionable means to collect a debt.'" *McCamis v. Servis One, Inc.*, No. 8:16-CV-1130-T-30AEP, 2016 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 99492 (M.D. Fla. July 29, 2016); *Church v. Accretive Health, Inc.*,

654 Fed. Appx. 990, 2016 U.S. App. LEXIS 12414, 2016 WL 3611543 (11th Cir. 2016).

22. An injury-in-fact sufficient to satisfy Article III standing requirements “may exist solely by virtue of statutes creating legal rights, the invasion of which creates standing.” *Church*, at 993, quoting *Havens Realty Corp. v. Coleman*, 455 U.S. 363, 373, 102 S. Ct. 1114, 71 L. Ed. 2d 214 (1982).

23. Violation of statutory rights are not a “hypothetical or uncertain” injury, but one “that Congress has elevated to the status of a legally cognizable injury through the FDCPA.” *McCamis*, at 4, citing *Church*, at 3.

24. Defendant is subjecting Plaintiff to false, deceptive, unfair, and unconscionable means to collect the debt which caused Plaintiff a concrete and particularized injury in the form of anxiety and worry that he would receive phone calls during working which would jeopardize his employment and also hours and uncompensated time and expenses spent seeking legal counsel about Defendant’s misrepresentations .

25. Accordingly, through the violation of Plaintiffs’ statutorily created rights under the FDCPA and the concrete and particularized injuries described above, Plaintiffs have suffered an injury-in-fact sufficient to establish Article III standing.

## **DAMAGES**

26. As a result of the Defendant's actions and/or omissions, Plaintiff has suffered actual damages, including but not limited to the following:

a.) Being subjected to false, deceptive, unfair, and unconscionable debt collection practices;

b.) Uncompensated time expended away from work and/or activities of daily living, to confer with counsel regarding the Defendant's collection efforts; and,

c.) Anxiety and worry due to concerns that he might be receiving phone calls during work, which might jeopardize his employment.

## **CAUSES OF ACTION**

### **COUNT I**

#### **VIOLATIONS OF THE FAIR DEBT COLLECTION PRACTICES ACT**

#### **15 U.S.C. § 1692 *et seq.***

27. Plaintiff incorporates by reference paragraphs 1 through 26 as though fully stated herein.

#### ***Violations of 15 U.S.C. § 1692c and subparts***

28. A debt collector may not, without the prior consent of the consumer given directly to the debt collector or the express permission of a court of competent

jurisdiction, communicate with a consumer in connection with the collection of any debt at the consumer's place of employment if the debt collector knows or has reason to know that the consumer's employer prohibits the consumer from receiving such communication.

29. Defendant had direct and actual knowledge that the Plaintiff could not receive calls at the stated times.

30. Defendant's threat to continue calls after receiving revocation from Plaintiff as described herein violated 15 U.S.C. § 1692c(a)(3).

***Violations of 15 U.S.C. § 1692d and subparts***

34. Having actual knowledge that the Plaintiff is unable to receive calls during her working hours, the Defendant's threat to continue calls during this time period were intended to harass, abuse, embarrass, and intimidate the Plaintiff.

35. Defendant's conduct violated 15 U.S.C. § 1692d.

***Violations of 15 U.S.C. § 1692e and its subparts***

31. 15 U.S.C. § 1692e specifically prohibits the use of any false, deceptive, or misleading representations or means in connection with the collection of any debt.

32. The use of "or" in § 1692e means a representation violates the FDCPA if it is false or deceptive or misleading. *Bourff v. Rubin Lublin, LLC*, 674 F.3d 1238, 1241 (11th Cir. 2012).

33. The standard in determining the nature of any such representation is that of the "least sophisticated consumer." Its purpose is to protect "naive consumers" with a minimal understanding of personal finance and debt collection. *LeBlanc v. Unifund CCR Partners*, 601 F.3d 1185, 1194 (11th Cir. 2010).

34. Moreover, the least sophisticated consumer is not to be held to the same standard as a reasonably prudent consumer. The least sophisticated consumer, though not unreasonable, is "ignorant" and "unthinking," "gullible," and of "below-average sophistication or intelligence," *Pinson v. JPMorgan Chase Bank, Nat'l Ass'n*, No. 16-17107, 2019 U.S. App. LEXIS 33662, at 12-13 (11th Cir. Nov. 12, 2019), quoting *Clomon v. Jackson*, 988 F.2d 1314, 1318 (2d Cir. 1993)

35. A false representation in connection with the collection of a debt is sufficient to violate the FDCPA, even if it is not alleged or proven to be misleading or deceptive.

36. Defendant's statements that it would continue phone calls to Plaintiff during work hours were false, deceptive, and misleading statements which threatened to take action which Defendant could not legally take.

37. Defendant's communications were in violation of 15 U.S.C. §§ 1692e, e(5), and e(10) among others.



38. As a result of Defendant's violations of the FDCPA, Defendant is liable to Plaintiffs for actual damages as described herein, statutory damages in the amount of \$1,000.00, costs of this action and reasonable attorney's fees as determined by the Court as mandated by 15 U.S.C. § 1692k.

## **COUNT II**

### **VIOLATIONS OF THE GEORGIA FAIR BUSINESS PRACTICES ACT**

#### **O.C.G.A. § 10-1-390, *et seq.***

39. Plaintiff incorporates by reference paragraphs 1 through 38 as though fully stated herein.

40. O.C.G.A. § 10-1-390 *et seq.* is commonly known as the "Fair Business Practices Act of 1975" (the "GFBPA").

41. The purpose of the GFBPA, is to protect consumers from unfair and/or deceptive practices in the conduct of any trade or commerce in part or wholly in the state. O.C.G.A. § 10-1-391.

42. O.C.G.A. § 10-1-391 directs that the GFPBA is to be interpreted and applied liberally and in harmony with the Federal Trade Commission Act, 15 U.S.C. § 45(a)(1), which implements the FDCPA.

43. O.C.G.A. § 10-1-393(a) of the GFBPA broadly prohibits unfair and/or deceptive business practices.

44. Defendant intentionally engaged in unfair and deceptive business practices, as set forth herein, in an effort to collect a consumer debt.

45. Defendant's conduct has implications for the consuming public in general.

46. Defendant's conduct negatively impacts the consumer marketplace.

47. Collecting a debt incurred during a consumer transaction could harm the general consuming public if conducted via deceptive acts or practices and clearly falls within the parameters of the GFBPA. Thus, a violation of the FDCPA constitutes a violation of the GFBPA. *See 1st Nationwide Collection Agency, Inc. v. Werner*, 288 Ga. App. 457, 459 (2007).

48. Upon information and belief, Defendant does not maintain a place of business in Georgia and has no assets in Georgia, thus relieving Plaintiffs of the Notice and Demand requirements of O.C.G.A. § 10-1-399(b).

49. As a result of Defendant's violations of O.C.G.A. § 10-1-393(a), Plaintiff is entitled to recover general damages pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 10-1-399(a).

50. As a result of Defendant's intentional violations of O.C.G.A. § 10-1-393(a), Plaintiff is entitled to recover exemplary damages pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 10-1-399(a).

51. As a result of Defendant's intentional violations of O.C.G.A. § 10-1-393(a), Plaintiff is entitled to recover treble damages pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 10-1-399(c).

52. Plaintiff is entitled to recover reasonable attorney's fees and expenses of litigation pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 10-1-399(d).

**TRIAL BY JURY**

53. Plaintiff is entitled to and hereby requests a trial by jury.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff prays that judgment be entered against Defendant for:

- a.) Plaintiff's actual damages;
- b.) Statutory damages pursuant to 15 U.S.C. § 1692k;
- c.) Reasonable attorney's fees and costs pursuant to 15 U.S.C. § 1692k
- d.) General, exemplary, and treble damages pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 10-1-399(a) & (c);
- e.) Reasonable attorney's fees and costs pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 10-1-399(d);
- and
- f.) Such other and further relief as may be just and proper.

Respectfully submitted this 18th day of August, 2020.

**BERRY & ASSOCIATES**

/s/ Matthew T. Berry

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